



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

2 CRIMINALLY CHARGED WITH ALIEN SMUGGLING

DES MOINES, Iowa—A man and a woman were criminally charged in federal court Wednesday for two separate cases of transporting illegal aliens, the result of investigations conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents.

Wenceslao Garcia-Gonzalez, 22, and Soledad Garcia-Gonzalez, 27, (no known relation) both citizens of Mexico, were each criminally charged in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Iowa with transporting illegal aliens in two separate and apparently unrelated cases. If convicted, they each face up to five years' imprisonment and fines of up to \$250,000.

A Jasper County Sheriff's deputy Monday stopped a Chevy Tahoe for license plate violations on Interstate Highway 80. The vehicle contained nine men, including Wenceslao Garcia-Gonzalez, who was driving. Suspecting their illegal status, the Sheriff's Department contacted ICE special agents who determined that Garcia-Gonzalez and his eight passengers were illegal aliens.

In another alien smuggling case Tuesday, an Iowa State Patrol trooper stopped a Ford Expedition for speeding near Des Moines on I-80 and discovered 11 occupants inside. An ICE special agent responded to the scene and determined that all were illegal aliens, including the driver, Soledad Garcia-Gonzalez.

Affidavits attached to the criminal complaints filed in court allege that both smuggling loads had originated in Phoenix, Ariz., and were destined for New York State. The affidavits also allege that Soledad Garcia-Gonzalez was to be paid \$250 for each alien upon arrival in New York. Wenceslao Garcia-Gonzalez was to be paid \$500 for each person being transported.

“There are significant perils associated with human smuggling,” said Estela Biesemeyer, resident agent-in-charge of ICE Des Moines Office of Investigations. “ICE is committed to working with other law enforcement agencies to identify and dismantle the criminal organizations behind this ruthless enterprise.”

Biesemeyer indicated the dangers involved by recalling a March 4 case when a van carrying 10 illegal aliens was involved in a deadly collision near Earlham, Iowa, in which three occupants were killed and the rest hospitalized. The driver, Carlos Alberto Vasquez-Vasquez, 22, of Mexico, is also being criminally prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney’s office for transporting illegal aliens.

The Des Moines ICE office has so far apprehended 281 illegal aliens discovered in 25 smuggling vehicles during fiscal year 2005, which began Oct. 1. The drivers of six of the vehicles have been criminally prosecuted; three have pleaded guilty. During the entire previous fiscal year, the Des Moines office apprehended 193 illegal aliens in 12 smuggling loads. All vehicles were encountered on or near Interstates 80 or 35 in central Iowa.

ICE special agents and detention and removal officers in Nebraska and Iowa have responded to a combined total of 77 smuggling loads during fiscal year 2005, primarily along Interstate 80. The incidents resulted in arresting 947 illegal aliens.

In recent years, human smuggling gangs have descended on the Southwest border, building a lucrative industry by charging people substantial fees to be illegally smuggled into the United States. To address this growing threat, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement launched Operation ICE Storm in the Phoenix, Ariz., and the surrounding area. ICE Storm is an unprecedented multi-agency initiative to dismantle organized criminal outfits that have made human smuggling a profitable but bloody business venture.

Since its beginning in October 2003, ICE Storm has led to prosecuting 308 defendants on a wide range of violations, including: human smuggling, money laundering, kidnapping, hostage-taking, narcotics smuggling and possession, and illegal weapons possession. More than \$7.2 million in criminal currency has been seized from smuggling organizations, along with 160 weapons, including: handguns, AK-47s, and SKS military assault rifles. Furthermore, 6,061 illegal aliens have been apprehended in the Phoenix area.

In addition, ICE Storm has been credited with a significant drop in crime in the Phoenix area, with area police pointing to significant declines in the city’s murder rate, sexual assaults, aggravated assaults, robberies, weapons seizures, and smuggling-related violence.

A charge is merely an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.